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UNDER A SPELL.

J. DE W. GIBBS.

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NO.	NO.	NO.
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UNDER A SPELL

A Comedy in One Act

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH

OF

LABICHE AND JOLLY

BY

J. DE W. GIBBS

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CHARACTERS

FRANÇOIS CABOUSSAT . . . . . *A retired business man*
POITIMAS . . . . . *President of the Etampes Academy*
MACHUT . . . . . *A veterinary surgeon*
JEAN . . . . . *Caboussat's servant*
BLANCHE . . . . . *Caboussat's daughter*

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1888.

UNDER A SPELL.

SCENE. — CABOUSSAT'S *house at Arpajon. A country parlor. Door* C., *opening on garden. Side doors* R. *and* L. *A buffet* L. *Table* R., *with writing materials. Table at back, with cups, plates, etc.*

JEAN (*alone, arranging plates on buffet*). Dear, dear! No sooner does one get the plates arranged than they have to be put away again; and they are hardly replaced on the shelves before they have to come out again. (*A dish falls from his hands and breaks.*)

(*Enter* MACHUT.)

MACHUT. Hulloa!

JEAN. Oh, hang it! The gilded salad-bowl.

MACHUT. How industrious you are!

JEAN. Oh! It's only the horse-doctor. How you frightened me!

MACHUT. What will M. Caboussat, your master, say, when he sees these fine samples of crockery?

JEAN (*gathering up pieces*). Oh, he will not see them. I shall bury them at the back of the garden, — I have a nice little grassy mound there, near the peach-tree.

(*Enter* BLANCHE.)

BLANCHE. Jean! (*Seeing* MACHUT.) Ah, good-morning, M. Machut.

MACHUT (*bowing*). Mademoiselle.

BLANCHE (*to* JEAN). You have not seen that gilded salad-bowl anywhere, I suppose?

JEAN (*hiding pieces*). No, Miss —

BLANCHE. I want it to put some strawberries in.

JEAN. I think it must be in the dining-room sideboard.

BLANCHE. I will go and see. It is remarkable the way the dishes disappear.

JEAN. I don't know of any having been broken!

(*Exit* BLANCHE.)

MACHUT. Well, you *have* got cheek!

JEAN. Well, Monsieur, what would you have me do? If she knew the bowl was broken, think how unhappy she would be.

MACHUT. Oh, by the way — I have come to see the cow.

JEAN. It's no use.

MACHUT. Why?

JEAN. She is dead. I think she ate part of a decanter which was carelessly buried.

MACHUT. Ah, you don't dig deep enough.

JEAN. True — but it has been so warm this month.

MACHUT. By the way, this is a great day! Your master must be in a fine state of excitement.

JEAN. Why?

MACHUT. Why, in a couple of hours they are going to elect the president of the Agricultural Society of Arpajon!

JEAN. Do you think M. Caboussat will be elected?

MACHUT. I have no doubt of it. I have already drained thirty glasses to his good-luck!

JEAN. Really? Well, you don't show it.

MACHUT. I canvass for your master. That is fair enough, since I am the family practitioner.

JEAN. There is an adversary of his who is a sly fox — M. Chatfinet — a retired lawyer — he has done nothing for the last month but gossip with the rustics.

MACHUT. Ah, he has done better than that. Last Sunday he went to Paris, and returned with half a hundred little red balloons, and distributed them gratis to the farmers' children!

JEAN. Ah, that was very sharp!

MACHUT. Yes — but I have got even with him there! I spread the report that balloons brought on hailstorms, and every one was destroyed immediately. (*Chuckles.*)

JEAN. What a diplomat this Machut is!

MACHUT. No, we don't want Chatfinet — to the deuce with Chatfinet — an impostor, who would bring his own veterinary surgeon with him!

JEAN (*aside*). Oh, I see now.

MACHUT. What we want is M. Caboussat. An honest, steady man, and a scholar. For one can see that he is a real *savant*.

JEAN. Oh, yes — he sits in his study for hours at a time,

with a book in his hand — his eye fixed — his head immovable — as if — (*incredulously*) as if he did not understand.

MACHUT. He is reflecting.

JEAN. He buries himself in thought. (*Looking off.*) Ah, here he is! He is "burying" now. I must be off and "bury" too! (*Picks up fragments and exit*).

(*Enter* CABOUSSAT, *reading.*)

MACHUT (*aside*). He does not see me.

CABOUSSAT (*to himself*). "Note: the past participle, constructed with *avoir*, and immediately followed by an infinitive, agrees whenever the infinitive can be turned into a present participle." Oh! how my head aches!

MACHUT (*aside*). That is probably Latin or Greek. Ahem!

CAB. (*clapping book into his pocket*). Ah, is it you, M. Machut?

MACHUT. Do I disturb you, M. Caboussat?

CAB. No — I was reading. You have come about the cow?

MACHUT. Yes — I have heard the sad denouement.

CAB. Yes, wasn't it funny? A piece of glass. The cow was four years old —

MACHUT. Ah, Monsieur, but cows will eat glass at any age. I knew one once who ate a sponge with which the carriages had been washed. *She* died. *She* was *seven* years old.

CAB. How frail a thing is — life!

MA. Come, now; I want to talk with you about the election. It is coming on famously.

CAB. Really? Then they appreciated my address?

MA. I should rather think they did. It was capitally delivered, and put together in such fine style! I count on an overwhelming majority.

CAB. So much the better — if only to rile that old Chatfinet, my opponent.

MA. And, now, if you *are* elected, you may rise — yes, you may rise considerably.

CAB. How do you know?

MA. Why not? You are already town-councillor — who knows but you may yet be mayor?

CAB. I? Oh, what an idea! But I am not ambitious. And the post has been filled by M. Roquet for the last twenty-five years.

MA. Still another reason. Each in his turn — he has been there long enough. Between you and me, I don't think he is a very able or learned man.

CAB. Nevertheless —

MA. He does not understand Greek.

CAB. But it is not necessary to understand Greek to make a good mayor of Arpajon!

MA. It would do no harm, Monsieur. You see, I meet both kinds. Mark my words — before long you will wear the glorious scarf of mayoralty.

CAB. I do not wish or expect it. But, nevertheless, as mayor — I see that I could do some service to my country.

MA. Certainly; and you would not stop there.

CAB. Once mayor of Arpajon —

MA. You would become district councillor —

CAB. Frankly, I think perhaps I would; and then —

MA. Councillor-general —

CAB. Oh! that is too much! And then? —

MA. Who knows? M. P. perhaps.

CAB. I would address the house! And then —

MA. Oh, confound it! Then — I don't know!

CAB. (*aside*). Councillor-general — member of Parliament — (*sadly*) but no, it cannot be. I forget that it can never be.

MA. But one must begin at the beginning. First, you must become president of the Agricultural Society. I have seen the principal electors — they are all excitement!

CAB. Are they, really? In my favor?

MA. Entirely. To be sure, there is old Madon, who has a grudge against you —

CAB. What have I ever done to him?

MA. He thinks you haughty.

CAB. Is it *possible?* Why, I never meet him that I do not inquire for his wife — a most uninteresting woman!

MA. Yes — you pay compliments to his wife, but you don't inquire for his cabbages.

CAB. What do you mean?

MA. He has planted an acre of them for his cows. He says that you have passed them twenty times, and that you have never so much as said, "Fine cabbages!" As President of the Agricultural Society, remember, such things are your duty.

CAB. Good gracious! To tell the truth, I have not even noticed these cabbages!

MA. That is very remiss in you. Chatfinet, your adversary, was brighter. This morning he said to him, "Oh, I declare! what splendid cabbages!"

CAB. Did he? The rogue!

MA. You ought to go and see father Madon, and just squeeze in a word about his cabbages. Only don't appear to make a point of it — do it naturally, you know.

CAB. At once! I will go at once! Jean!

JEAN (*appearing at door*). Did Monsieur call?

CAB. My hat — hurry!

(*Exit* JEAN.)

MA. I will go with you. I will give you your cue.

(JEAN *brings in hat.*)

CAB. I have an idea! I will ask him for some seeds of his cabbages!

MA. Capital! Ha! Ha!

(*Exeunt, laughing,* C.)

JEAN (*alone*). Monsieur puts on his best hat to go and get cabbage-seeds! What an idea!

(*Enter* POITIMAS, *with valise.*)

POITIMAS. M. Caboussat at home?

JEAN (*aside*). A stranger!

POI. Tell him M. Poitimas, President of the Etampes Academy, wishes to see him.

JEAN. He has just gone out, but he will not be long.

POI. Then I will wait for him. Take my bag.

JEAN. Ah! Monsieur is going to stay?

POI. Probably.

JEAN (*aside*). Bah! A room to be got ready!

POI. I bring M. Caboussat a considerable bit of news.

JEAN. Really? What is it?

POI. None of your business. How is Mlle. Blanche, his daughter?

JEAN. Very well, thank you.

POI. I have hardly seen the dear child since she came to Etampes this summer. I have just received a valuable case ef pottery — some ancient nails — and a great many other Roman antiquities.

JEAN (*puzzled*). What are they?

POI. None of your business. Mlle. Blanche seemed to me like a very pretty and accomplished girl.

JEAN. Oh, indeed she is. But she keeps a pretty sharp lookout on the crockery.

POI. I want to see if I can carry out my plans.

JEAN. What are they?

POI. None of your business. Tell me, when they plough in this part of the country, what do they find?

JEAN. How do you mean?

POI. What do they plough up?

JEAN. Oh! (*Pauses to think.*) Well — they find — angle-worms —

POI. I speak of antiquities. Gallo-Roman remains?

JEAN (*recoiling*). Ah, Monsieur, I don't know anything about them.

POI. I will profit by my stay here, to do a little excavating. By my Gallic map, I have discovered the existence of a Roman road at Arpajon.

JEAN. Indeed!

POI. I have a positive instinct about these things. I have only to look at a piece of ground, and I say at once, "I smell Roman remains here, or my nose is wrong!"

JEAN. Indeed! (*Aside.*) And I expect he is not quite right in his mind!

(*Enter* BLANCHE.)

BLA. I cannot find that salad-bowl.

JEAN. Ah, there is Mademoiselle. (*He retires up.*)

BLA. Monsieur Poitimas!

POI. Mademoiselle!

BLA. What a pleasant surprise! How pleased papa will be to see you!

POI. Yes — I bring him quite a piece of news.

BLA. M. Edmond, your son, has not come with you?

POI. No — just now he is laid up with a sprained ankle.

BLA. Oh, what a pity!

POI. It was partly my fault. I had been excavating here and there at the end of the park, and forgot to warn any one. He fell in there one evening. (*Consoled.*) But I found a knife-handle of the thirteenth century!

BLA. And for an old knife-handle you have spoiled my partner?

POI. Your partner?

BLA. Yes; this summer M. Edmond invited me to dance every evening; you think he will recover soon?

POI. Oh, it is only an affair of a day or two.

BLA. He will not be lame?

POI. Oh, no; that would be a great misfortune, as he is almost of an age to marry.

BLA. (*ingenuously*). Ah!

POI. So are you, I think.

BLA. I? I don't know? Papa has not spoken of it to me. (*Aside.*) Does he want to request my hand for M. Edmond?

POI. I have a little proposition to make to you.

BLA. (*aside, nervously*). Yes, it is as I thought.

POI. When they dig in the garden — (BLANCHE *starts*) what do they find?

BLA. Why, I suppose they find earth and stones.

POI. With inscriptions?

BLA. I don't know!

POI. We will ascertain — later.

BLA. If you like to come upstairs, I shall be happy to show you your room.

POI. (*taking bag*). Thank you.

BLA. Your windows look on to the garden.

POI. So much the better. I can examine the conformation of the ground. (*Aside.*) The place has a Roman odor!

(*Exeunt* BLA. *and* POI.)

JEAN. He is going to sleep here! It makes me nervous!

(*Exit* JEAN, *shivering. Enter* CABOUSSAT, *with cabbage in one hand and beet in the other.*)

CAB. Well, old Madon is settled! I asked for one of his cabbages as a work of art — said I was going to put it up in my parlor! (*Laughs.*) Then, there was a neighbor in his field of beets; he began to look slighted, so I had to do the same by him; he's an elector, too. Asked *him* for a *beet* — also as a work of art! One must please "the masses." But these things are dreadfully heavy! (*Calls.*) Jean!

JEAN (*entering*). Monsieur?

CAB. Take these things, Jean. Boil the cabbage. As for the beet — cut it up in slices — they are not bad in a salad.

JEAN (*aside*). So Monsieur has taken to doing his own marketing now!

(*Exit* JEAN.)

CAB. (*alone*). All the time I was carrying my cabbage home, I was pondering upon what Machut said to me. I will be mayor, then councillor-general, then member of Parliament, and then — I shall have a place in the ministry,

perhaps — who can tell? But no — it cannot be. I am rich, respected, beloved! — But one thing opposes my plans — spelling! I *cannot* learn to spell! E-a, or a-e — t-i-o-n, or c-i-o-n — or s-h-i-o-n — when I am at a loss, I make a blot. But that is not correct spelling. When I speak, it is all very well — people cannot tell by the sound. But, ah! in my day we did not vegetate in schools. I learned to write in twenty-six lessons. To read — I don't know how I learned to read! Then I plunged into the timber business. I know my weights and measures, but composition is beyond me. Think of the speeches I make. Those startling speeches! All Arpajon listens to me, open-mouthed, like so many idiots! I have a really great reputation. And whom have I to thank for it? An angel —

BLA. (*entering*). Papa!

CAB. There she is! There is the angel!

BLA. (*giving him a paper*). I have been looking for you to give you this speech which you are to make before the "Agricultural Society."

CAB. If I am elected! You have corrected it.

BLA. Only made a fair copy of it.

CAB. Like the others. Ah, dearest, what should I do without you? (*Referring to paper.*) How do you like the beginning?

BLA. It is splendid.

CAB. (*reading*). "Gentlemen and dear fellow-townsmen. Agriculture is the noblest of professions." Right to the point, you see. Hulloa! You have put two s's in professions!

BLA. Why, certainly.

CAB. Ah, you little darling. I spelt it t-i-o-n. "The noblest of professions," with two s's. "I venture to say that those who do not love the ground — whose hearts do not bound at the sight of a plough — they do not understand the nation's true wealth." Rather pithy, that! Oh, so you spell "nation" with a "t."

BLA. Always.

CAB. Ha! ha! I very stupidly spelt it with an s-h. "The nation's true wealth," with a *t*.

BLA. (*suddenly*). Oh, papa, I forgot to tell you that M. Poitimas has come!

CAB. Poitimas? Poitimas of Etampes? (*Aside.*) He's a *real* savant! (*Aloud.*) Why, where is he? (*Looks about.*)

(*Enter* POITIMAS.)

CAB. Ah! my dear friend! I am delighted to see you! (*Shakes hands warmly.*)

POI. I have been wanting for some time to explore your neighborhood from an archæological point of view.

CAB. Ah, yes, broken china, eh? That always seemed to interest you!

POI. Always. I also have an important subject on which to consult you.

BLA. (*aside*). Ah, the proposal for my hand. (*Aloud.*) I will leave you. I hope, M. Poitimas, that you will spend several days with us.

POI. I dare not promise. It will depend upon my excavations. If I find — I will stay!

BLA. Then, let us hope you will find!

(*Exit* BLANCHE.)

CAB. Nice little girl — my Blanche — don't you think so?

POI. Charming! And it is with much pleasure — but of this later. My friend, I bring you a very considerable piece of news.

CAB. To me?

POI. You are to be nominated, on my recommendation, as correspondent member of the Etampes Academy.

CAB. The Etampes Academy! (*Aside.*) He pitchforks me into the Academy!

POI. *There* is a surprise for you!

CAB. Yes — it — it *is* a surprise. But I really don't know that I ought to accept it. My claims are so slight!

POI. And your speeches?

CAB. Oh, my speeches are the attraction. (*Aside.*) The little darling!

POI. Besides, I have my own reasons for nominating you. You can be very useful to us.

CAB. How?

POI. You can superintend the excavations I am going to make in this country. You can translate the Latin inscriptions, and you can prepare the reports.

CAB. (*aghast*). In Latin?

POI. And now, do you know, I suspect that very near Arpajon there are the remains of one of Cæsar's camps. Do not speak of it!

CAB. Oh, don't alarm yourself!

POI. Our department has not found one — it is perhaps the *only* one.

CAB. Ah, *that* is against it!

POI. Then, I have made researches which I will communicate to you. Gabius Lentullus must have passed by here.

CAB. No, really? Gaberus Lentul — lul — lul — you're sure?

POI. Perfectly. But don't mention it.

CAB. Oh, don't worry. I will not!

POI. But I have come here with still another motive. My son Edmond saw Mlle. Blanche at Etampes this summer; he has fallen desperately in love with her, and I profit by my excavations to open the question of marriage.

CAB. Good gracious! Well, I can say neither yes nor no until I consult my daughter.

POI. That is right. Edmond is a good fellow; affectionate — accomplished — he never drinks, except a little brandy in his coffee, a dot of 130,000 francs.

CAB. That is nearly as much as I give Blanche.

POI. But before we proceed farther — one must confess the worst. He has *one* fault — a fault which is *almost* a *vice*.

CAB. The devil he has! What is it?

POI. Well, know, then — no, I cannot. I, President of the Etampes Academy! (*Giving him letter.*) There! you shall read it for yourself.

CAB. A little hit at the Academy?

POI. A letter he sent me a week ago, and which I am loath to submit to you.

CAB. (*reading*). "My dear papa. I have something to confess to you, on which my very life and happiness depend — "

POI. (*aside, indignantly*). Two p's in depend! The wretch!

CAB. "I have loved Mlle. Blanche Caboussat with an ardent love ever since the first day I saw her — "

POI. (*aside*). S-o-r — saw! Oh! the booby!

CAB. "I do not eat — I do not sleep — "

POI. (*aside*). E-A! Oh!

CAB. "Her image fills my life and haunts my dreams."

POI. (*aside*). Double e in the wrong place! (*Aloud.*) It is atrocious, is it not?

CAB. What?

POI. Well, I wished to tell you — now you know it.

CAB. I know that he adores my daughter!

POI. But against all rules! Well, decide. I will go and inspect your garden; it seems to me to have a Roman aspect. Well — I will see you later.

(*Exit* POIT MAS.)

CAB. (*putting letter in his pocket*). What on earth was the fault of which he wanted to speak, I wonder? (*Enter* BLANCHE, *with hat and gloves.*) So you have made your toilet. Are you going out?

BLA. Yes; I have owed a call to Madame Vercelles for a long time. The family is very influential — her husband is a *voter!* I shall take a carriage!

CAB One moment. Blanche, have you ever contemplated marrying?

BLA. (*innocently*). I? Oh, *never*, papa.

CAB. Well, suppose a nice young man were to solicit your hand — affectionate — accomplished — no drinks, except in coffee —

BLA. (*aside*). M. Edmond!

CAB. Should you, under these circumstances, feel any repugnance —

BLA. (*eagerly*). Oh, *no*, papa. (*Demurely.*) That is — I should want to do as you wished.

CAB. I only desire that you should be happy, after all you have done for me.

BLA. What have I done for you, papa?

CAB. Why, my speeches — my letters.

BLA. I have only rewritten them.

CAB. Yes, that's right — we don't want to dwell too much on *them.* Go, and come back early.

(*Exit* BLANCHE.)

CAB. Oh, by the bye! I have a guest! I must think of dinner. An academician; just the sort of man to relish delicacies! Jean!

JEAN (*entering*). Monsieur —?

CAB. What have we for dinner?

JEAN. Well, Monsieur, there is the cabbage — and then the beet —

CAB. I don't mean those, idiot!

JEAN. Why, when Monsieur goes to market himself —

(*Enter* POITIMAS, *triumphantly, with a fragment of a Dutch oven, full of earth, and a rusty old spit.*)

POI. (*excitedly*). I came — I rummaged — I found!

CAB. What have you there?

POI. A Roman shield — "scutum," you know, the long shield —

CAB. Yes?

POI. "Clypeus" is the round shield.

JEAN (*aside to* CAB.). Monsieur — it is a piece of our old Dutch oven! (*Laughs softly.*)

CAB. (*to* JEAN). So it is! I remember it perfectly!

POI. Here you see the "gladium"! (*Brandishes spit.*) The centurion's sword! An extremely rare piece.

JEAN (*aside to* CAB.). It is our old broken spit!

CAB. (*laughing, aside*). This man would find something Roman in a burnt lucifer match!

POI. My friend! I have discovered a burial mound at the bottom of the garden.

JEAN (*horror-stricken, aside*). At the bottom of the garden!

POI. I am so excited! (*To* JEAN.) Go and buy me two sous' worth of Blanc d'Espagne, mix and strain it for me, and bring it to me in a bowl!

CAB. What will you do with it?

POI. I want to clean up these fragments. I hope to discover some inscriptions. Go!

JEAN. Immediately. (*Aside.*) He must be a rag-and-bone man!

(*Exit* JEAN.)

POI. Oh, I forgot — I came to say that there is a peach-tree in the way.

CAB. Where?

POI. At the bottom of the garden — to the left. I wanted to ask if I might cut it down.

CAB. Oh, no, please! It produces *such* peaches! They are small — but very juicy.

POI. My friend, I demand it in the name of science. (*Strikes attitude.*)

CAB. Ah, now you speak of *science*, I can refuse her nothing. (*Aside.*) She who refuses me everything!

POI. Thank you — thank you in the name of Archæology! I will return and continue my researches. By the way, have you spoken to your daughter of this marriage?

CAB. I have just hinted at it. She seems to have no objection.

POI. And the fault? Have you confided it yet?

CAB. Not yet. I am deliberating upon the best means of breaking it to her.

POI. Yes, poor child. It is a terrible thing. I will return later. It smells more than ever of Roman remains!

(*Exit* POITIMAS.)

CAB. I am rather worried about that fault that is almost a vice. I should be glad to know what it is.

MA. (*appearing at back and speaking off*). It is a slander, and I will prove it to you!

CAB. Machut! what is the matter?

MA. M. Chatfinet has spread an infamous report about me!

CAB. The unprincipled *wretch!*

MA. He states that *I* have killed your cow!

CAB. But it is false. She died before you arrived!

MA. Yes; write that on a piece of paper now, and I will take it to him and contradict the creature!

CAB. (*aside*). Write it! And my daughter is not at home! (*Aloud.*) My friend, this is one of those base and improbable lies to which a man replies best by scorn and silence!

MA. Oh, yes; but I prefer to shut him up. Quick — write me a few words!

CAB. But you do not consider; it will look like a certificate!

MA. Exactly. That is what I want.

CAB. No, I cannot — it is impossible.

MA. What? You refuse? You refuse to speak the truth? For *me?* *I*, who have tramped the country for the last eight days, inducing people to vote for *you!*

CAB. You are right. Yes, I will give you this certificate.

MA. Ah!

CAB. Later — to-morrow.

MA. Immediately! The electors have assembled, and I want to read it before them all.

CAB. (*aside*). Before them all! And Blanche is not here!

MA. It affects my reputation — my honor as a veterinary surgeon! If I cannot refute this, I am lost! Ruined!

Obliged to quit the country! Think of my wife and my five children!

CAB. (*relenting*). It's a fact — he *has* five children.

MA. (*arranging paper*). There — write here. It is nothing for a scholar like you to scratch off two lines.

CAB. Two lines only, then. (*Sits at table*, R.)

MA. "This is to certify that my cow died before M. Machut arrived at my house." That is not long.

CAB. True. (*Aside.*) Probably I can do it with the aid of a few blots. "This — is — to — certify — F-I — I do'nt think there is a final e! But I am not sure! Hang it! Here goes for a blot! (*Continues writing.*)

MA. Ah, now we shall see how disconcerted M. Chatfinet will be!

CAB. (*giving paper*). There, my friend. Excuse an occasional blot — a very bad pen!

MA. (*taking and folding paper, without looking at it*). Oh, that makes no difference — I am quite satisfied!

CAB. (*aside*). Well, I am not satisfied!

(*Enter* BLANCHE.)

BLA. I have returned.

CAB. Ah! you have arrived too late. I have just written a certificate (*aside to* BLANCHE) *myself!*

BLA. What do you mean?

MA. Yes, here it is! I am going to show it to every one. (*Puts it in his coat pocket and looks for hat.*)

CAB. (*aside to* BLA.). Oh, if you had only been at home!

BLA. (*aside to* CAB.). At any cost, we must get hold of this paper.

CAB. (*to her*). But how? (BLA. *goes to window.*)

BLA. (*aside to* CAB.). He has it in his coat pocket. I have an idea! (*To* MACHUT.) M. Machut, have you your case of instruments with you, your lancet?

MA. Yes; why?

BLA. Run quickly, then — the bay mare has just fallen with a rush of blood to the head!

MA. Ah! the poor mare! And this morning the cow! I will hurry! I don't want them to accuse me of anything else! (*Going.*)

BLA. Better take your coat off — it will be in your way!

MA. No, I can't stop! (*Rushes out*, C.)

BLA. Unsuccessful!

CAB. Oh, Blanche! Do you think the poor animal —

BLA. Oh, the poor animal is very well! A trick to induce M. Machut to leave his coat!

CAB. Oh, I understand! He usually works in his shirt-sleeves.

BLA. But now, when he finds the mare is *not* ill —

CAB. Rest assured! He will find something the matter. He opens a beast's eyelid, and then turns to you and exclaims, "Yes, it is a sprain!"

(*Reënter* MACHUT.)

MA. There! It is done.

CAB. What?

MA. I have bled the animal.

CAB. Well — that's right.

MA. Abundantly — two minutes later the poor thing would have been dead.

JEAN (*entering with bowl*). Here is the Blanc-d'Espagne.

BLA. (*aside*). Oh! another idea! (*To* JEAN.) Throw all that on Machut!

JEAN (*to* BLANCHE). Oh! I'm afraid he will not like it!

BLA. (*to* JEAN). Do as I tell you!

JEAN. Well, I don't mind! (*He passes between* MACHUT *and* CABOUSSAT, *and upsets bowl on* MACHUT'S *coat.*)

MA. (*hopping about*). Murder! Fire! Oh!

BLA. You clumsy fellow!

CAB. Idiot!

JEAN. But Mademoiselle told me to —

BLA. (*aside to* JEAN). Keep still, you foolish man!

JEAN (*going out*). I will get a brush! (*Exit*, R.)

CAB. (*to* MACHUT). Quick! Take off your coat!

MA. (*absently, brushing his shoulder with one hand*). Thank you — if it is not too much trouble.

CAB. Come, take it off at once!

(*They help him.*)

BLA. (*taking coat*). I will go and brush it, and bring it back to you!

(*Exit* BLANCHE, *hurriedly*, L.)

MA. Really, I am very much obliged. It is very kind of Mlle. Blanche to brush it herself.

CAB. (*loftily*). Yes, that is a little way we have here!

MA. (*aside*). Any one could see that it is election-day!

JEAN (*entering quickly with brush*). Here is a brush! (*Vigorously brushing* MACHUT'S *shirt.*)

MA. Aïë! You prick me with the bristles!

POI. (*entering with broken china and handkerchief.*) Ah! my friends! What joy! I have found an ancient burial-mound under the peach-tree!

JEAN (*aside*). My hiding-place!

POI. (*holding up golden porcelain*). Look at this, in the first place!

JEAN (*aside*). Drat it! The gilded salad-bowl.

CAB. Eh? I recognize that!

POI. The mark is underneath — an F. and a C.

CAB. (*aside*). François Caboussat!

POI. (*joyously*). Fabius Cunctator! It is signed!

CAB. (*looking at* JEAN). Who broke this?

POI. The Romans, undoubtedly.

JEAN. Yes — it was the Romans. (*Aside.*) The wretch actually digs up everything I bury.

(*Exit* JEAN, L.)

POI. (*holding up part of a cuspador*). Here is another fragment. Do you know what it is?

MA. Eh? (*Steps up to look. Recoiling.*) Yes, I can tell you what that is!

CAB. Let me see. (*Looking, and quickly falling back.*) So can I! Why does he bring it here?

POI. (*fondly*). Very rare — it is a tear-bottle; — of the Decline!

CAB. That? (*Aside.*) But what is the use of enlightening him? It amuses him.

POI. (*romantically*). When the Romans lost a member of their family, it was into this that they poured forth their sorrows!

MA. (*suppressing laughter*). Really? That was a curious custom!

(POI. *goes to buffet and arranges his spoils.*)

JEAN (*entering*, L.). Here is your coat, Monsieur.

MA. (*putting it on*). Thank you. Have I still the certificate? (*Feels in pocket.*) Yes, here it is.

CAB. (*aside*). Blanche's writing! I am saved!

MA. Well, I must leave you. I am going to the election. I will come back to give you any news.

(*Exit* MACHUT.)

CAB. (*to* JEAN). Explain to me how the gilded salad-bowl —

JEAN. Excuse me — they are waiting for me to chop some wood. (*Exit, rapidly.*)

POI. (*at buffet*). A piece of glass! *Glass!!*

CAB. (*aside*). Yes, my decanter!

POI. (*coming down*). And there are donkeys who pretend to say that the Romans did not know glass! I will let fly a dissertation at them.

CAB. That will be capital!

POI. My friend, I owe to you one of the richest days in my life, and I will at once make known to my colleagues — (*smiling, correcting himself*) to *our* colleagues (CAB. *bows awkwardly*) at the Academy this great archæological fact!

CAB. That will be a — a good idea.

POI. I will beg them to institute a committee to continue the excavations in your garden.

CAB. Oh, no!

POI. In the name of science! Quick — a pen — ink —

(*He goes to buffet.*)

CAB. Not there — at this table!

(POI. *sits at table*, R.)

POI. Ah, you have only quill-pens?

CAB. Always. A fifty-year-old habit of mine.

POI. They are too blunt. You have a knife?

CAB. (*giving him one*). Here you are!

POI. (*with ironical smile, while sharpening pen*). Ah! So the Romans did not know glass. (*Screams.*) Oh!

CAB. What is the matter?

POI. I have cut myself!

CAB. Wait — in the drawer — (*Flies to drawer of stan.., up* L. C.) a rag! — (*Binds up* POITIMAS' *finger.*) I will make you a little doll! Don't move — there!

POI. Thank you. Now I shall have to ask a favor.

CAB. What?

POI. Take the pen in my stead. I will dictate.

CAB. (*aside*). The devil! (*Aloud.*) But don't you think —

POI. What? (*Rises and reseats himself*, L. C.)

CAB. (*deprecatingly*). For me to write to the Academy —

POI. Why, you are a corresponding member!

CAB. (*sitting at table*). All right. (*Aside.*) Every one seems to conspire to get me to write to-day, and my daughter not here!

POI. Are you ready?

CAB. One moment. (*Aside.*) Perhaps — with blots!

POI. (*dictating*). "My dear friends and colleagues. Archæology is soon to be enriched — "

CAB. (*aside*). What plaguey long words!

POI. Have you written that?

CAB. Wait. (*Aside.*) Archæology! q-u-e or k-e, I wonder? Oh, a thought! (*Seizes knife and begins to sharpen pen.*)

POI. "Is soon to be enriched, thanks to my indefatigable investigations — "

CAB. (*uttering a cry*). Wow!

POI. What is the matter?

CAB. I have cut my finger! Get me another rag out of the drawer!

(POI. *rushes to stand*, L. C., *and gets rag.*)

POI. Here it is — wait — let me play the good Samaritan this time. (*Binds up* CAB.'S *finger.*)

CAB. (*aside*). Ah, that is it! I am saved! (*Wiggles finger.*)

POI. (*wiggling finger*). This is distressing!

(*A pause; both sit and look at each other, wiggling fingers.*)

CAB. Shall I call my daughter? She writes a beautiful hand.

POI. Oh, you are a happy father! Do you think she will accept my son?

CAB. Why not?

POI. Excuse my pressing for a speedy answer, but it is a family matter. In Etampes, on the Boulevard, there is a charming villa which will be to let by All Saint's Day —

CAB. Well?

POI. I could buy it for them to start housekeeping in.

CAB. Eh? My daughter go to live in Etampes?

POI. Certainly; the wife follows the husband.

CAB. Oh, but — (*Aside.*) No, I could never get along with my spelling at Etampes and myself in Arpajon! Impossible!

BLA. (*entering*). I hope I do not intrude.

POI. I will leave you, Mademoiselle. I have just asked your father to communicate to you my — er — a considerable communication!

BLA. Ah!

POI. I should be most happy if you would consider it!

(*Voice outside cries*, "*M. Poitimas! M. Poitimas!*")

POI. There is your gardener calling me. I left him in charge of the new excavations under the plum-tree. (*Bows to* BLA. *and exit* C.)

CAB. (*aside*). Evidently this young man will not do for us at all. Besides, he has a fault. I don't know what it is; but it is almost a vice!

BLA. Well, papa, what is your "communication"?

CAB. This is it. Ridiculous! Preposterous! Poitimas actually took it into his head that you would marry his son Edmond!

BLA. (*with suppressed emotion*). Indeed!

CAB. You do not know him — I will describe him to you. He is not a bad fellow — but he is bald, short-sighted, vulgar, with a "corporation like an alderman!"

BLA. But, papa —

CAB. I do not wish to bias you — you are perfectly free, you understand. And then he has lost three front teeth —

BLA. Oh, come! Not so bad as that!

CAB. Also, he has a fault — a dreadful fault — almost a vice!

BLA. A vice! M. Edmond!

CAB. (*taking out letter*). Yes, I have it right here in my pocket. Listen and tremble! (*Aside.*) Perhaps *she* will detect the vice! (*Reads.*) "My dear papa. I have something to confess to you, on which my very life and happiness depend. I have loved Mlle. Blanche Caboussat with an ardent love —"

BLA. (*aside*). Ah! How good he is!

CAB. "Ever since the first day I saw her at Etampes. I do not eat, I do not sleep —"

BLA. (*aside*). Poor fellow!

CAB. Have you discovered the fault yet?

BLA. No!

CAB. (*aside*). Then it must be farther along. (*Reads.*) "Her image fills my life." That is abominable, is it not?

BLA. On the contrary, I think it is beautiful.

CAB. Beautiful! (*Putting letter in pocket.*) I was certain that this marriage would not suit you.

BLA. (*surprised*). Why, papa! —

POI. (*entering*). They have cut down the plum-tree, but they have found nothing.

CAB. My plum-tree! The devil they have!

POI. (*to* BLA.). Well, Mademoiselle, what reply am I to take to my son?

BLA. (*confused*). Really, sir —

CAB. (*aside to* BLA.). Let me answer for you. (*To* POI.) I am very sorry, my dear friend, to be obliged to tell you that it will be impossible to overlook that fault.

POI. I understand. I was prepared for this.

CAB. (*to* BLA.). You see, M. Poitimas was prepared for this.

POI. But do not throw me into despair. Promise me that some day — if, for instance, he should ever become a Bachelor —

CAB. (*aside*). The deuce! Isn't he one now?

POI. A Bachelor of Arts —

CAB. (*brightening*). Oh, in *that* case —

POI. We understand each other. I will go and strap my valise, and return home at once. (BLANCHE *retires up, weeping softly.*) I hasten to report this bad news to my son. But I have a favor to ask. May I take away these relics of a bygone age? (*Points to fragments.*)

CAB. Certainly — now that they are broken!

POI. I will put them in the Etampes Museum, with the inscription "Caboussatus donavit." (*Bows low and goes towards door.*)

CAB. You are very kind!

(*Exit* POITIMAS.)

CAB. Well, that affair is over. Are you happy? What! What is the matter! Are you crying?

BLA. You did not tell the truth about M. Edmond. He is not bald and vulgar! He is handsome and clever and good?

CAB. How do you know that?

BLA. We danced together last summer.

CAB. Bother it! Really? And he is not displeasing to you?

BLA. (*shyly*). Not very.

CAB. (*aside*). She loves him! Poor little thing! I've actually made her cry!

MA. (*entering*). You're elected! Chatfinet had just one vote — his own! (CAB. *does not reply.*) Eh? My news does not seem to please you?

CAB. Oh, your news? Yes — oh, yes, delightful!

MA. Good luck to you! (*Calling.*) Jean! (*To* CAB.) I have told him to get out two baskets of wine.

CAB. What for?

MA. To wet the whistle of the masses — to give the agricultural classes a holiday! It is only fair! Jean! Bring the wine!

JEAN (*entering with two baskets of wine*). Here it is! (*Aside to* MA.) I have stuck in two bottles of Bordeaux — you and me, you know!

MA. (*taking one basket*). Let us go, then!

(*Exeunt* JEAN *and* MACHUT.)

CAB. (*aside*). My poor little Blanche! I must not hesitate! (*Sits at table, and takes pen and paper.*)

BLA. Eh? He is writing all by himself! (*Looks over his shoulder.*)

CAB. (*writing*). "Citizens of Arpajon. I send in my resignation — "

BLA. Nonsense! (*Takes paper and tears it.*)

CAB. What are you doing?

BLA. "Resignation" is spelt with a "t"!

CAB. Dear, dear! I put s-h again! (*Aside.*) I can't even resign without my daughter!

(POITIMAS' *voice heard outside, speaking.*)

CAB. There he is again!

BLA. I will go.

CAB. No — stay.

POI. (*entering with valise*). My dear friend, before taking leave of you —

CAB. (*taking valise*). *My* dear friend — women are changeable creatures. I have just been talking again with my daughter, and we have turned over the pros and cons. In short, I have the satisfaction of telling you that she consents to marry your son. (BLA. *demonstrates joy.*)

POI. (*dropping his relics*). Ah, Mademoiselle, how happy I am! I will at once buy the little house in Etampes.

BLA. What little house?

CAB. (*sadly*). That which you will occupy with your husband.

BLA. (*aside*). Oh, poor papa! What will become of his lectures? (*To* POI.) There is one condition which papa has forgotten to mention.

POI. What is that?

BLA. On no condition whatever will I consent to leave Arpajon.

CAB. (*aside*). Ah, the dear child!

POI. I understand. It is a district so rich from an archæological point of view! That will not be an obstacle. We will only ask you to come to Etampes two months out of the year.

BLA. (*looking at* CAB.). Two months —

CAB. (*aside to* BLA.). Accept. I will arrange my affairs to suit. (*Aside.*) I can always cut my finger! (*To* POI.) That is quite satisfactory.

POI. (*to* BLA.) How good you are to overlook Edmond's fault!

BLA. What fault?

POI. (*aside to* CAB.). You have not told her?

CAB. No; my courage failed me! You tell her. (*Aside.*) Now we shall know what it is!

POI. (*to* BLA.). My son is a good fellow — affectionate, accomplished, no drinks (except in coffee), but — he has never been able to learn to spell correctly.

CAB. (*aside, in relief*). Is that all?

BLA. Oh, well, we'll manage that! My father knows how easily that fault is overcome!

CAB. (*aside to audience*). Another pupil! She will have to pose as the family dictionary!

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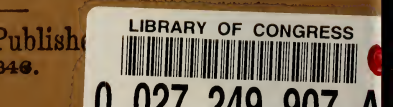

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